



South Indian Katar

Thanjavur (Tanjore), India, 17th century

Steel

59cm long

Stock no.: A5822

Provenance: Roy Elvis Collection

The katar is a punch dagger which is unique to India, and almost always used by Hindu warriors.¹ The grip, which is perpendicular to the blade, is fixed between two flanges which provide protection to the hand. The katar could be held in the right hand as an independent weapon, or in the left hand in conjunction with a shield.²

The blade is attached to the hilt with twin plates in the form of two addorsed yalis, the Hindu mythological creature with the body of a lion and head of a dragon. The tails of the yalis meet at a stylised palmette. These plates extended from the curved handguard, which is decorated with four parrots and a border of pierced palmettes. The pierced flanges are decorated with parrots, heads bent to preen their wings. At the top of the handles are a pair of yalis, heads intertwined. The crosspiece is formed from two bulbous bars, connected by seven small balls.

This South Indian katar comes from a celebrated group of daggers, produced in Thanjavur in the 17th century, and characterised by their chiselled and pierced flanges. They are almost all decorated with yalis and parrots, as well as fish and scale patterns. Katars from this group are generally fitted with European blades. Several examples are held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The European fullered blade of a katar (accession no. [36.25.1020](#)) is linked to the hilt by plates formed from two affronted yalis, tails similarly meeting around a palmette. Another example (accession no. [36.25.1022](#)) features a yali and parrots on the flanges, with plates of four parrots around a palmette joining hilt and blade. The form of these four parrots closely resembles the parrots on the flanges of the present example. Most similar of all is a dagger (accession no. [36.25.1023](#)) with a similar crosspiece formed from bulbous bars linked by 5 balls, each decorated with a fish scale pattern, like the present example. Yalis also feature on the flanges and connecting panels.

[1] Stone, George Cameron. *A Glossary of the Construction, Decoration and Use of Arms and Armour in All Countries and in All Times*. Portland: Southworth Press, 1934. P. 345.

[2] *Ibid.* P. 344.